

Salem Lamartine 9:30 3/2/69

*Processional Hymn 159
*Choral Call to Worship
*Confession of Sin--
*Assurance of Pardon
Scripture Matthew 21; 33-46
Gloria Patri
*Apostles Creed
*Pastoral Prayer
Anthem
Announcements
Wed. Lenten Service 7:30
CONGREGATION MEETING 7:30
CHORAL AT 2:00

ST. John Emelton 11:00 3/2/69

*Processional Hymn 11
*Choral Call to Worship
*Confession of Sin
*Assurance of Pardon
Responsive Reading Sel27 Page 578
Hymn 26
Scripture Matthew 21; 33-46
Gloria Patri
*Apostles Creed
*Pastoral Prayer
Anthem
Announcements
Lenten Services TODAY
Lenten Service Lamartine
WORLD DAY OF PRAYER
PRES MARCH 7 2:00

Offering, Response, Prayer
Hymn- 470
Sermon
Prayer & Lord's Prayer
*Hymn 223
*Benediction
*Threefold Amen

Offering, Prayer
*Hymn 154
Sermon
Prayer & Lord's Prayer
*Hymn 469
*Benediction
*Threefold Amen

The Vineyard of the Lord

Text: Matthew 21; 33-46

As our Scripture we heard another ~~example~~ of the parables of Jesus. We are now well into the Lenten Season and this parable points very directly to Jesus as, "The Suffering Servant." But it also gives us some very definite guidelines for our lives.

In this parable Jesus was telling of something that was very real in the lives of His listeners. Every detail was very much fact and quite familiar to these people. He starts out by saying that, "A man, a landowner, planted a vineyard; he fenced it around, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad." The hedge mentioned was a thick thorn hedge to keep out wild animals such as boars and also to keep out thieves who would steal the grapes. The wine press consisted of two troughs that were either hollowed out of the rock or built of bricks. And every vineyard had a wine press. The way it worked was due to its construction. ^{THE TROUGH} One was a little higher than the other and it connected with the lower one by a channel. The grapes were pressed in the higher one and the juice ran off into the lower trough. The tower had a two-fold purpose. It served as a watch tower to watch for thieves, and as a place of lodging for those who were working in the vineyard.

And as for the actions of the owner of the vineyard going away, this too was normal. It was very common for estate owners to rent out their estates to someone else. Their only concern was that the rent came in on time. The rent could be paid in three different ways. It could be strictly for money, or it could be for a fixed ^{amount} ~~percentage~~ of the fruit, no matter what the crop may be, or it might be an agreed percentage of the crop. Nor was the action of the ~~cultivators~~ ^{TENANTS} entirely out of line. Palestine was seething with unrest, and the working people were discontented and rebellious. So it could have been possible for them to seize the son of the landowner and kill him. But it isn't too hard to see to whom Jesus is pointing His attack. The vineyard is the nation of Israel, and the owner of the vineyard is God. The ~~cultivators~~ ^{TENANTS} are the religious leaders of Israel. The messengers who were sent repeatedly are the prophets sent by God. Many of them were rejected and killed. And the Son who came last and was killed is Jesus Him-

self. So you see this is a very appropriate lesson for this time of the year. But more than that it is just as up to date as anything we could pick up and read today. It tells us of the privilege that is ours. God gives us everything we ~~need~~ need. The hedge, the wine press, the tower, everything that the tenants need to run the estate. You see God not only gives us the tasks to do, but He gives us the means to do it as well. But how often do we look at it that way? We take everything we have pretty much for granted many times. We are many times too self sufficient. We rely on ourselves and seem to think and feel that we are the ones responsible for what we have and what we are. But we need to get back to the old feeling and belief that everything we have and everything we are comes to us from the goodness and love of God. Perhaps this is a bit old fashioned, and perhaps it may be looked down upon, since the current trend toward atheism frowns on this. But if we are really believers in a Divine creator, a God as we have worshipped, then it is high time we returned to the old ways and the old principles of religion. It is good to make changes and to modernize things as needed. But we need to begin once again to believe in a God who created everything and who gave us all we have and made us what we are. This is what Jesus was pointing out in this parable.

God gives man freedom. Just as the estate owner gave the tenants the run of the vineyard, so God gives us the freedom to live. God has trusted each of us with a life to live. He is no harsh taskmaster who stands behind us and makes sure that we do what must be done. Just the opposite is true. He trusts us with what He has given us to do. If we live as we should then we can enter into the joy of our Lord. If we do not live as we should we are told that we enter into the joy of Satan and his domain. This is the choice that is given to us by God. How we live and what we do is up to us. This is the freedom given to man by his Creator.

But with this freedom there comes a day when we must answer for what we have done with what has been given to us. This we often refer to as the day of reckoning. We need have no fear though if we have been faithful tenants of the vineyard. If, however we have not been faithful tenants, then we need indeed fear.

This parable tells us a lot about Jesus. It shows us that Jesus quite frankly admits that the messengers who came before him were just that, messengers. They were prophets and very clearly Jesus is saying that He the Son, broke the line of prophets that came from ^{God} ~~God~~. God was not content to keep sending prophet after prophet to people who would not listen. So finally He sent His Son. As Jesus tells the parable, the landowner thinks to himself, "They will respect my son." In other words this is what God ~~knows~~ must have thought, at least this parable ^{EXPRESSES IT THIS WAY} ~~tells us this~~. But you see, this Son was no ordinary prophet or messenger. This was the Son.

The final thing that this parable tells us is the Sacrifice of Jesus. Here He clearly sets it down that He knew what lay ahead. He was well aware of the consequences that He must face. The way He sometimes spoke of it, ~~He~~ did it so matter of factly. It almost seems as though He were telling His followers something simple, such as; it's a nice day. But it wasn't something simple and easy. It was the pronouncement that He would suffer and die. But as said before, He did it willingly. No one did it for Him. He did not die because He was compelled to, He did it because He wanted to. This would require love. Probably much more love than you and I could muster. We should always be aware of this sacrifice that was made for us. And especially during Lent we are made aware of this gift. We should be more humble at this time and should show more humility in our lives. When we stop to think of this overwhelming thing that was done for each of us our hearts should overflow with love. Yet we are usually very reserved with our love for Christ. We can find it easy to show love to our families, to our children, to our parents and even to friends. But, how much love do we give to Christ? We come to Church and we worship, which is good. But the gift which God gave for us is taken so much for granted. We don't think too much of it except at this special time of the year. Perhaps if we each one strove just a little bit harder to show our love for Christ in our daily lives, could bring about a change not only in ourselves, but in others around us. Lent is not the only time when we should be grateful and thankful for the sacrifice of Jesus. We should be grateful and thankful all of our lives. Just think of the pain and the suffering endured for us, by the Son of God. Isn't this

reason enough for us to want to change ourselves from the weak, sinful people that we are? And we are weak, and we do sin, contrary to the feelings and the belief some. One of the doctrines of the Methodist Church has to do with striving for perfection. A continual striving to become a better and better person. Very few Methodists would state that they can reach perfection in this life. But one contractor I did some work for, very frankly and seriously stated that he was perfect. When I heard him state this I told him I never realized that I was working with Jesus. His men after this often referred to him as Jesus. But you see we are not without sin. The Psalmist states, "For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me." But if we point our thoughts to the cross, we can realize that Jesus died for our sins. That we can have forgiveness for our sins. Many things have been written down through the years about the cross, which gives us some indication how mens thoughts have been upon it. Sir John Bowring who was ~~an~~ a distinguished Englishman wrote the hymn, "In the Cross of Christ I Glory." In it he states the love that comes from it. The peace and the blessing brings into the life of the Christian. We may have sung it many times and never given it much thought. I would like to share it with you once again and perhaps if we were to take its words to heart we can become more Christlike in our lives.

"In the cross of Christ I glory, Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
 All the light of sacred story gathers round its head sublime.
 When the woes of life o'er take me, hopes deceive and fears annoy,
 Never shall the cross forsake me; Lo! it glows with peace and joy.
 When the sun of bliss is beaming Light and love upon my way,
 From the cross the radiance streaming Adds more luster to the day.
 Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure, By the cross are sanctified;
 Peace is there that knows no measure, Joys that through all time abide."

Let us pray.